

THE STRUCTURE OF BEOWULF:
A DETAILED CONSIDERATION OF MOTIFS

an Honors Thesis
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For Bēowulf of Pentara

Poetry is like painting. One work will please you more if you stand close to it; the other strikes more if you stand farther away. One shows more to advantage when seen in the shadow; another, unafraid of the sharp view of the critic, ought to be viewed in the light. One will please only once; the other, though looked at ten times, will continue to please.

Horace, Ars Poetica

[361-65]

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Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Epigraph	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Introduction	1
Review of Literature	4
The Interlace Theory	19
Textual Analysis	25
Introduction through Fitt V.	29
Fitts VI through VIIII	41
Fitts X through XII	52
Implications for Further Study	59
Notes	61
Bibliography	67

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--Nicholas Dorochoff, Jr.

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Introduction

The Old English poem Beowulf, like any great work of art, has been received by critics with varying degrees of respect and admiration. The poem has been described both as the brilliant conception of a master scop and as a mediocre compilation of two or more tales by inept scribes. One group of critics has argued that the poem is a masterpiece of theme marred by structural imperfections, while another group has claimed it a thematic wreck salvaged only by the persona of the hero. Reacting to such divergent commentary, J.R.R. Tolkien defended the integrity of the Beowulf poet: "Any theory that will at least allow us to believe that what he did was of design, and that for that design there is a defense that may still have force, would seem more probable."¹ As indicated by Tolkien's comments, critics have not disputed the poem's eminence; rather they have scrutinized it in order to reconcile its seeming flaws with the consensus of scholarly opinion which continually reaffirms the poem's greatness.

The poem's structural unity has been questioned since the beginning of serious study of the Beowulf. Franz Klaeber, in the introduction to his edition of Beowulf, employed the coincidence of specific parts of the poem with other Scandinavian, Icelandic, and Germanic myths to divide the epic into two parts.² Klaeber further labeled individual sections of the poem episodic and digressive because they interfere with the "steady advance" of the hero's story. As his analysis and the title lately given the poem suggest, the epic has usually been considered the life and deeds of Beowulf.³ Many critics have, therefore, attempted to account for the structural peculiarities which arise from this extrinsic identification of the poem as the biography of the hero.

The interlace theory proposed by John Leyerle is one of the most ingenious of these explanations. Leyerle noted the recurrence of various "themes" or "motifs" throughout the poem and postulated that the effect would be somewhat like that of an interlace, a type of design found extensively on objets dating from the period of the Beowulf. In his essay, "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf," Leyerle stated that the epic, when explained in terms of interlaces in the visual arts, would be unified structurally.⁴

A theory such as that proposed by Leyerle is certainly a brilliant means of describing one way in which the form of a culture's plastic arts may affect the structure of its literary works, and, as a means of asserting the structural unity of the Beowulf, the interlace theory is practically unparalleled in its ingenuity. The fact that many scholars have concurred with and elaborated on Leyerle's postulation of an interlace structure indicates the critical influence of his theory. The presence of an interlace structure, however, has not yet been determined by a detailed analysis of the entire text of the poem.

With the vast amount of scholarly criticism being produced concerning the Beowulf, it seems impractical, and in fact imprudent, to conceive new and divergent suppositions treating any aspect of the poem while such cogent theories as Leyerle's remain unproven. The primary purpose of this study has, therefore, been to discern from evidence gathered concerning objets dating from the period of the poem, from reputable criticism of the Beowulf, and, most importantly, from data derived from the Old English verse itself, whether the interlace theory adequately describes the structure of Beowulf or merely represents a brilliant but inadequate answer to the long-debated question of structural unity.

The first chapter of this study reviews criticism pertinent to a consideration of the structure of Beowulf. The second chapter discusses the interlace theory in particular, focusing on the general method described by Leyerle and

the applicability of his method to a detailed textual study. The method implemented to determine the suitability of describing the poem's structure as an interlace is presented in the third chapter along with the initial findings of this study. Chapters four, five, and six describe in detail the results of a detailed analysis of 836 consecutive lines of the poem. Each of these chapters closes with a comprehensive summary of the data presented. The final chapter, then, briefly summarizes the conclusions of this investigation and offers recommendations for further study of Beowulfian structure.

Review of Literature

The annotated edition of Beowulf by Franz Klaeber is considered the definitive edition. Klaeber presented in his introduction not only the background information of the poem, but also an analysis of its structure. His division of the poem into two sections resulted from analogues in the mythology of Germanic peoples. The first part deals with Beowulf killing Grendel and his mother. The second part Klaeber labeled the "Hero's Homecoming," which concerns the return of Beowulf to his native land and his fight with a dragon fifty years later.¹

According to Klaeber, the poem also contains allusions to events not directly related to the two main actions, the killings of Grendel and his dam being considered together as the first action. These allusions consist of 450 verses in part one and 250 verses in part two, a total of 700 lines of the poem's 3182. Included among the allusions are songs, speeches, stories of past deeds, historical matter, and references to Old Testament events. Although Klaeber admitted that these allusions add significant background information to the poem, he labeled them episodes and digressions since they differ from the main action in terms of content and chronology.² This isolation of two main actions and of episodes and digressions results from an identification of the poem as a biography of the hero rather than as an epic poem.

J.R.R. Tolkien, in his essay concerning the Beowulf, proclaimed to the scholarly world the necessity of viewing the poem as the work of a medieval poet. The perceived structural flaws, Tolkien contended, arise from the subjection of the poem to the intensive scrutiny of modern minds equipped with views of literary unity which are incompatible with the epic and may, furthermore, have been formed after the epic was written. Tolkien advised his readers that the language of

the poem is wrought to a high finish; for the poet to have spent so much time in composing Beowulf while ignoring major problems of structural unity seems improbable.³ Tolkien suggested, therefore, that the narrative sequence remain unquestioned. Rather than dissect the poem, critics should concern themselves with finding any evidence which would support the unity of the epic.

Many critics after Tolkien considered departures from the main narrative as centrally important to a description of the structural unity of the Beowulf. The foremost of these scholars, perhaps, is Adrian Bonjour, who set forth not to determine a description of the structure based on the digressions, but merely to defend further their presence in the poem. While he agreed with Klaeber that digressions may be detrimental to the poetic value of a work of art, Bonjour did contend that they may in fact be useful and may ultimately contribute to the merit of a poem. The digressions may provide a relaxation from tension, serve as a foil to material previously treated, or even possess a symbolic value which amplifies the effect of a poem and the audience's understanding of it. Bonjour asserted, and many agree with him, that the narrative is linked to the so-called digressive material not by explicit comparisons, but by subtle connections suggested by similarities between the narrative and the digressions. He went on to say that in using the episodic and digressive material, the Beowulf poet reached an artistic effect which allows the epic to transcend its immediate constraints of time and action.⁴

A.C. Bartlett further studied the prominence of the digression in Old English verse. Throughout her book, The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry, she used the analogy of the tapestry: Old English poetry, the Beowulf in particular, is seemingly organized in terms of rhetorical groups, which often begin and end with similar words or phrases. These groupings each possess an organic unity of their own and, when placed together, can be compared to a

series of panels in a tapestry.⁵ Bartlett also categorized the Old English digression into six groups. The last of these, the narrative digression, is most prevalent in Beowulf. The other five types, in Bartlett's view, are more interruptive than the digressions found in Beowulf, as the latter are unquestionably related to the main narrative in terms either of structure or of theme.⁶

Barbara Raw, like Bartlett and Bonjour, discussed the importance of the narrative digressions to the meaning of Beowulf. She contended that the main narrative presents the hero as an idealized, mythic character, and that the episodes and digressions represent the unavoidable failure which occurs in the world of reality. In the final section of the poem, in which the ideal and the real meet, "reality (in the shape of the hero's age and the cowardice of ordinary men) is shown to be inadequate to the demands of the heroic situation."⁷

Michael D. Chermiss' view of the structure of Beowulf is based on the almost universally accepted assumption that the poem was intended to be performed rather than read, and his conclusions both support and expand those of earlier critics. Chermiss stated that the epic, as an oral work, is unified since practically any part of it is explicable by references to its immediate narrative context. He went on to assert that each digression, no matter how far removed from the main action in terms of chronology, enters the flow of the narrative quite smoothly, almost as if by a process of association. As the immediate rhetorical effect is all important, the poet would have been less concerned with inconsistency in minor matters while at the same time allowing for subtle correspondances between various parts of the poem.⁸

A number of critics, then, permitted consideration of the digressions and episodes as legitimate sections of the poem. Although these approaches justify, to some extent, the value of such episodic material, they do not unquestionably

prove the unity of the epic. Since unity is, however, a greatly desired artistic beauty, critics have sought more certain means of connecting the major fights to each other and to the allusions. The most obvious solution is to discover a theme appropriate to both sections of the poem, and this thematic approach to the unification of the epic has been explored by many scholars.

Arthur G. Brodeur, in his book The Art of "Beowulf," offered a thematic means of rejoining the two main actions. He saw the unifying theme as the relationship between ~~thane~~ and king. Beowulf, in the first part of the poem, is depicted as the perfect heroic thane while Hrothgar, whose kingdom is being attacked by the monster Grendel, is seen as the perfect non-heroic king. Hrothgar is highly praised by the poet, yet lacks the superhuman strength necessary to kill the monster. Beowulf, as heroic thane, possesses these powers and does succeed in his efforts to rid Hrothgar's land of both Grendel and his mother. In the second part, Beowulf is depicted as the heroic king. He insists on fighting the dragon alone, even though he is not as powerful a fighter as he was in his youth. When the dragon mortally wounds him, Wiglaf steps in to help his king, and with Wiglaf by his side, Beowulf is able to slay the dragon. Wiglaf was treated by Brodeur as the perfect non-heroic thane who will brave even the most terrible of battles to aid his heroic king.⁹

John Walter Wallace examined the Iliad and the Odyssey along with Beowulf in his doctoral dissertation, "Structures in Primary Epic." He asserted that the Iliad and the Odyssey are tragic and romance respectively, and that the Beowulf is a synthesis of the two concepts. Wallace identified the society presented in the Old English epic as one based on romantic concepts and contended that the tragic perspective of the events of the poem is inevitable.¹⁰ Wallace seems to echo Brodeur in some respects, for both describe Beowulf as

the perfect or ideal warrior in the first section of the poem and later as the perfect or ideal king. Wallace, however, differs from Brodeur concerning the Christian overtones of the poem: Brodeur saw Hrothgar as the perfect non-heroic king, but Wallace asserted that the Danish lord is a representation of the Christian God. The character of Beowulf also takes on greater religious significance in Wallace's study. He described the ways in which Beowulf appears as a saviour figure, a representation of Christ, thus carrying Brodeur's unifying theme of the relationship between thane and king to its Christian extreme.¹¹

Stanley J. Kahrl presented a view which focuses on a single theme as the basis for the unity of the poem. In his essay he drew attention to the repeated allusions to feuding and observed the recurrent use of the Old English word fēoð throughout both sections of the poem. He suggested that the word in its various contexts may be considered a unifying element.¹² Kathryn Hume noted that Kahrl concentrated too much on the recurrence of a single motif or theme. She believed the poem to be idea-oriented, rather than hero-oriented, and insisted that many ideas must be taken into account when describing the thematic unity of the epic. Her conclusions concerning the Beowulf develop the central idea of monsters as threats to social order and the limitations of the hero's power to restore that order.¹³

A rather unconventional view of structural unity is presented by Margaret Goldsmith in The Mode and Meaning of "Beowulf." Goldsmith based her description of the structure on Tolkien's observations concerning the contrast of the two stages in the hero's life and on Bonjour's treatment of the episodic and digressive material. She did, however, add much to these two views in combining them; she relied heavily on the Christian aspects of the poem and explained its unity, in part, by comparing it to the Life of St. Guthlac and the Vita s. Antonii. In short, Goldsmith stated that the Beowulf was perceived by its

original audiences as a poem consisting of both historical and allegorical elements which combine to produce the prototype of the Christian knight, Beowulf.¹⁴ The first part of the epic, Goldsmith asserted, presents the battle between Beowulf and Grendel as an example of the hero's mortal strength. The fight with Grendel's dam shows the hero's limitations by stressing his reliance on the supernatural, namely the Christian God; he is unable to kill the hag by the strength of his hand alone. Goldsmith, however, presented the parallels between these two battles and those in Guthlac and Antonii as evidence of the Christian background of the audience rather than of the direct influence of hagiography.¹⁵

Goldsmith, in her interpretation of the second part of the epic, maintains her assumption of a Christian audience. If the critic presumes a Christian point of view and keeps in mind the ideal of striving after the things of heaven while rejecting those of this world, it follows logically that Beowulf dies in seeking a rusted and imperfect dragon's hoard. Goldsmith concluded, "there could be no more fitting end to the poem than the interment of the hero's ashes together with the gold."¹⁶

Brian Shaw approached the question of unity by examining the speeches in the epic. He disclosed in his essay the fact that fifteen formal speeches in the poem are divided into three groups: seven speeches occur before Grendel's death, one before his mother's death, and seven before the dragon's death. The two sets of seven speeches are paired thematically, yet the two members of each pair approach their subjects from different perspectives. The first seven speeches speak of society in positive terms, pointing always to the imminence of peace and prosperity through the work of a hero. The central speech, however, changes the tone. Here the controlling concept, Shaw asserted, is that evil cannot be ultimately defeated by humans. By the same token, the remaining

seven speeches bewail a doomed society, the necessity of defense, the failure of peace, and the death of a hero. The thematic division, according to Shaw, is that in the first section of the poem evil can be defeated and that man must continue his struggle not in fatalism, but in confidence of winning. The second section, by contrast, defines the difficulty and futility of the struggle, at the end of which the hero lies dead, offering not even the faintest glimmer of hope for his people.¹⁷

Martin Stevens described the structure of Beowulf as consisting of a closed set of images which link narration with style. He asserted a basic structural principle: that which is good and helpful to society is rightly used in the first section of the poem and is missing or misused in the second. The poet's concern is not with structural units, but merely with progress and regress. To illustrate this concept, Stevens focused on the manner in which "gold-hoard" and "word-hoard" are used throughout the poem.¹⁸

The healthy world, Stevens stated, is one in which goods and words are exchanged; movement signifies health and life, while stasis signifies illness and death. The first section of the poem is alive with movement, gift-giving, and dialogue, while in the second part there are no feasts. Here the dragon hides the gold, making it useless, and dialogue reverts to mere addresses without answers. The cup, an important symbol of health and unity in the hall celebrations, becomes in the second section a rusty, empty vessel which is stolen and ultimately brings not health and prosperity but death and destruction. Stevens, then, as scholars before him, referred to the epic as consisting of two parts. The first section concerns itself with a society which can restore its happy existence through the works of a hero, while the second depicts a world in which even the hero cannot save his people.¹⁹

Joan Blomfield's view of Beowulf's unity combines subject and structure in an attempt to describe the unifying principle of the epic. She contended that the structure of the poem is complementary rather than sequential. The events of the poem, therefore, rather than forming a "logical" linear progression, are juxtaposed without regard to chronology. The effect, then, is that of a collection of events whose connections are drawn solely by a "centre of attention," that is, the hero Beowulf. To support this description of the structure, Blomfield offers examples of seemingly disparate events which appear side by side in the poem. According to Blomfield, the generally high degree of abstraction and formalism in the verse contemporary to the Beowulf, as well as the same qualities in the plastic arts of the period, tend to support this description of the structure.²⁰

Although the thematic approach to the problem of Beowulfian unity is a perfectly acceptable critical method, another group of critics, some inspired by John Leyerle's theory, see the unity as derived from the structure of epic. They describe structure as the relative positions of the different events, the patterns they form, and the recurrence of these patterns.

In perhaps the most inventive approach to the structure of the epic, John Mahony analyzed the structure as that of a three-act drama. Mahony argued in his dissertation, "The Monodramatic Structure of Beowulf," that the formal prologue-act division directly results from the cyclical nature of the action of Beowulf. Mahony also postulated that a variation in tone and verse rhythm permits the narrator to assume multiple roles in the revelation of characters in the epic. Both of these ideas, according to Mahony, originate in the ritual action of the poem, and that the poem's metaphor finds its origin in the myth-consciousness of the folk.²¹

Mahony's interpretation of the poem seems thorough and his essay well-documented. His description of the individual actions of the epic according to the divisions of myth and ritual are, for the most part, clear. In his explication of the text as a mono-drama, however, Mahony considered fully only the three main actions and few of the so-called episodes and digressions. He disregarded, in part, the journey of the Geats to and from Dane-land, the hall-celebrations, and various historical allusions, which include the elements of the poem which first prompted critics to question the poem's unity. The identification of the epic's structure as a drama having a proem; three acts, each introduced by a prologue; an interlude between acts two and three; and an epilogue, moreover, seems inappropriate to either the date of initial composition, c. 700-750, or the date of the manuscript, tenth to eleventh century. Terentian form would most likely have been known to a monastic poet or copyist, but Old Comedy develops intrigues in five actions, not three. The copyist, but not the original poet, may also have had an awareness of liturgical drama, but liturgical plays tend to represent one or more incidents without allusions to unrelated episodes, as are found in Beowulf.

H. Ward Tonsfeldt, in his essay "Ring Structure in Beowulf," saw the poem's unity in terms of the recurrence of ring structures. Tonsfeldt explained that ring structure is found mainly in the tradition of oral-aural epics, such as Homer's Odyssey. "Ring structure" is a term referring to a particular arrangement of events in a single passage; episodes are narrated in a specific order (A', B', C'), and then these incidents are repeated in a reversal of that order (C, B, A). Often one central event is inserted between the two sequences, and the pattern A, B, C, D, C', B', A' results.

According to Tonsfeldt, oral poetry tends to juxtapose events of the main plot and digressive materials. The formal repetitions in the ring would then

rhetorically unify the allusive and focal narratives. Tonsfeldt, for example, analyzed the description of Hygelac's death as A - reference to Hygelac's death, B - Beowulf's swimming after the battle, C - the result of the battle as the central event framed by the ring, B' - second reference to Beowulf's swimming, A' - second reference to Hygelac's death.²² The Geatish lord's demise is, on the other hand, merely subsidiary preparation for Beowulf's succession to the throne and the central account of the dragon's death.

Tonsfeldt applied his theory of the ring structure only to the episodic and digressive elements of the epic. J.D.Niles, however, elaborated on this theory and extended it from the non-biographic elements to the main narrative as well. He showed that the ring structure can be successfully applied to each of the three fights between Beowulf and the monsters and then went on to postulate that the entire poem may be analyzed in terms of the ring structure. The overall scheme would be as follows:

- A - Introductory Elements
- B - Fight with Grendel
- C - Celebration
- D - Fight with Grendel's Dam
- C'- Celebration
- B'- Fight with the Dragon
- A'- Concluding Elements²³

Niles, of course, made it quite clear that this scheme is over-simplified. The many other elements which may closely follow the pattern of A, B, C, D, C', B', A', are, furthermore, interspersed throughout the epic, so a detailed chart of the actual ring structures would become more complex.

Niles applied his ring structure theory to the Beowulf as a whole in order to establish the unity of the epic. He contended that the central

element of the ring is the most important and all other events serve only to frame this action. In his scheme of the ring structure for the entire poem, the battle with Grendel's mother is the central event framed by the narrative. Most critics find this fight to be rather unimportant, and it is often combined with the killing of Grendel. Klaeber, in fact, referred to the two encounters as one main action in which the death of Grendel's mother is a sequel.²⁴ According to a consensus of scholarly opinion on the content of the epic, Niles' conclusion is incorrect in giving such primary emphasis to the killing of Grendel's mother.

Niles' and Tonsfeldt's theories resemble that of John Leyerle,²⁵ whose interlace theory will be fully considered in chapter two. Leyerle's theory has been readily accepted by many scholars, and proved to be the immediate inspiration for Robert B. Burlin. Burlin proposed that in the larger structural patterns of the narrative, the interlace contributes powerfully to the shaping of human events. He added that the interlaces are very complex and show that the "tragic element of life is as natural as the coming of spring or of a dragon, and as inevitable as the interlacing of human events."²⁶

Leyerle's analogy continues to influence scholarship directly. Lewis E. Nicholson begins his essay, "The Art of Interlace in Beowulf," with an apologia of sorts:

Any attempt to establish synesthetic equivalencies [between interlaces in the visual and verbal arts] could appear embarrassingly arbitrary and subjective, but Leyerle fixes his attention on the two parallel spheres of activity and finds a clear and convincing correspondance between the "complex artificial order" of poetry and the curvilinear ribbon trails that form interlace designs of the visual arts.²⁷

Nicholson follows a number of "motifs" throughout the epic, such as the poet's juxtaposition of the fabulous and historical elements, to support an interlacing

of themes throughout the Beowulf. The metaphor of the body as a house receives the most extensive treatment in Nicholson's essay; he cites twelve examples from the text which either contain the comparison directly or imply it. These recurring metaphors, according to Nicholson, demonstrate the poet's intertwining of two motifs "like strands of yarn to spin his tale."²⁸ Nicholson also notes four instances of an "arrow motif" in the epic and asserts that each time a motif appears its significance increases along with the number of situations associated with that particular object. According to Nicholson, these examples demonstrate how "what appears at first to be a planless maze gradually takes on the appearance of an interwoven narrative or tapestry"²⁹

Constance B. Hieatt's work also appears related to Leyerle's proposed interlace. In her essay "Envelope Patterns and the Structure of Beowulf," she stated that many narrative sequences throughout the epic begin and end with similar words or phrases. Citing various examples of these patterns, Hieatt proposed that these "envelope patterns" lend a structural stability to the poem. In many cases a fitt, a numbered section of the epic, opens and closes with a key word or phrase. The fitt numbers, thus, may be of authorial origin and were not arbitrarily placed throughout the manuscript. The fitt divisions may, moreover, emphasize these envelope patterns.

Hieatt acknowledged that the evidence set forth in her essay seems to parallel Leyerle's theory, but she clearly stated that, in extending his analogy to label recurring words or word-groups as "themes," Leyerle has become dangerously subjective and vague.³⁰ In recognizing word patterns without assuming such patterns indicate an interlace, Hieatt suggested that the study of envelope patterns produces a view of the structure firmly rooted in the features of the text.

Like Hieatt, Eamon Carrigan also suggested that the fitt numbers are authorial in origin and stated that a symmetrical grouping of the fitts is the key to the structure of the poem. In his Essay "Structure and Thematic Development in Beowulf," Carrigan summarized each fitt, explained its relation to the rest of the poem, and set forth a number of charts which rely on the fitt groupings and a variation of Leyerle's interlace structure to assert the unity of Beowulf. Carrigan grouped the fitts according to apparent themes common to those fitts, resulting in these groupings: Fitts 1-13, 14-19, 25-30, 31-43; the number of fitts in each group results in a pattern of 13, 6, 5, 6, 13. In his first group, he counted the introduction to the poem as part of Fitt I, although it is not labeled so in the unique manuscript.³¹ If the fitt numbers are authorial and if the Beowulf poet intentionally created the symmetrical groupings Carrigan suggested, it would be expected that the author number the introduction as I, rather than placing the first fitt number at Carrigan's "second passage" of the introduction. Carrigan's extension of the analogy in identifying a type of structural interlace is further described by some critics as an ineffective assertion of structural and thematic unity.³²

Thomas E. Hart relied even more than Carrigan on the importance of numerical sequences in describing the structure of Beowulf. Hart suggested that numerical parallels within the Finn and Ingeld episodes prove conclusively that the unique manuscript is accurate in many respects. The evidence he cited presents the poem as a unity; the episodes and digressions described by critics such as Klaeber are directly linked to the other episodes and main narrative by their content and, most importantly, by the patterns they form.³³

Hart contended that the poem appears to lack unity due to the complexity of the underlying tectonic design. These numerical patterns provide the poem with an "abstract design" which is a unity because of its symmetry and internal

numerical proportions. His evidence for a structural unity based on repetition of words and word groupings seems firmly grounded in the text. Hart's treatment of the theme, however, insufficiently asserts the thematic unity of the epic. The connections between the Finn and Ingeld episodes are lucidly drawn, yet the unity of the poem as a whole is never thoroughly discussed. Hart seemingly relied too heavily on numbers and did not conclusively prove that the tectonic design illustrated in his essay coincides with the content of Beowulf.

Hart's discussion of formulaic craft is augmented by the independent views of John Miles Foley and Albert B. Lord.³⁴ Foley, in his essay "Beowulf and Traditional Narrative Song," claimed that the narrative inconsistencies of the epic possibly arise from the amalgamation of two distinct heroic lays. The verbal correspondances in the two sections, which seem to parallel Hart's corresponding numerical sequences, serve to unify the once separate poems.³⁵ Foley acknowledged his debt to the work of Albert B. Lord, who traced the basic elements of Beowulf to a practically universal Indo-European epic tradition. Lord's "Interlocking Mythic Patterns in Beowulf" presents the similarities between the Old English epic and a group of hero-songs which includes the Greek Odyssey and the Indian Rāmāyana. In each of these epics, Lord proposed, there exist the same sequence of events: a) the powerful leader-warrior is either not present or for some reason is rendered powerless; b) the people suffer grave misfortune; c) the leader returns or his power is restored, thereby saving his people. Lord applied this sequence of events to the Beowulf, stating that the pattern occurs twice: once in the Grendel segment, and again in the events concerning the demise of the monster's dam.³⁶

Lord's analysis does not account, however, for the geneology of the Danes, nor does he mention the events of the poem leading to Beowulf's fight with the

dragon. When these sections are considered, the pattern is roughly this:
 a) a powerful figure arrives; b) he is removed or rendered powerless; c) his people suffer misfortune. This pattern repeated ~~three~~ times, rather than the original sequence postulated by Lord, corresponds more readily to the events of the entire poem, though it does not produce a thoroughly satisfying description of the structure of the epic.

Critics, then, have advanced numerous and varied positions concerning the Beowulf. These responses offer both thematic and formal solutions to the problems of structural unity initiated by Klaeber and other critics. The postulated formal theories of the poem's unity, be they the principles of ring, envelope, or tectonic structures, depend upon patterns of repetition such as those identified by John Leyerle in his essay "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf."

The Interlace Theory

The use of the word "interlace" to describe the structure of a literary work is not indigenous to John Leyerle's 1967 lecture. As early as 1918, Ferdinand Lot analyzed the structure of a thirteenth-century Arthurian romance, Lancelot du Lac, as an interlacing of events.¹ Leyerle's own reference to the "interlace structure" of Beowulf first appeared in his essay "Beowulf the Hero and the King," published in 1965:

Beowulf, from the same approximate time and place [as the Codex Lindisfarnensis and the Sutton Hoo buckle], is also an interlace; it is a complicated design of intersections and juxtapositions, but has relatively few themes, which if followed closely, are found to end in the heads of monsters.²

In the remainder of his essay, Leyerle explained a manner in which the so-called digressions complement the main narrative in order to produce a singular effect of thematic unity. Leyerle stated, moreover, that to perceive clearly the design produced by the juxtaposition of events chronologically far removed, the overall pattern of the poem must be carefully observed. "What emerges is a structure of complex, knotted unity, unparalleled in English poetry,"³ a structure which Leyerle was to term an interlace.

In his later lecture, published in 1967 under the title "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf," Leyerle contended that the epic is in fact a unified work and that the structure of the poem is analogous to interlaces characteristic of the plastic arts dating from the same period.⁴ Decorative interlace in non-literary arts is a design composed of lines or discrete strips of color intricately braided and applied to a contrastive background. The artist's conception of the

pattern, rather than the construction of the background, determines the winding and twisting of the braid. Examples of this artistic method range from decoration on sword pommels to the carpet pages of Gospel manuscripts.

After establishing surface interlace as a common ornamental technique used by Anglo-Saxon artists, Leyerle identified two types of interlace in Beowulf: stylistic interlace and structural interlace. Stylistic interlace results directly from the repetitive nature of Old English poetry; it is simply the variation or repetition of descriptive phrases applied to one object or person. When two or more of these "strands" of repetition are combined, the result is a stylistic interlace. Leyerle demonstrated his thesis with Beowulf lines 2354-9:

Nō þæt læstest wæs
 hondgemōt[a] þær mon Hygelāc slōh,
 syððan Gēata cyning gūða ræsum,
 frēawine folca Frēslondum on,
 Hrēðels eafora hiorodryncum swealt,
 bille gebēaten.⁵

Hygelāc, Gēata cyning, frēawine folca, and Hrēðels eafora make one strand; mon . . . slōh, hiorodryncum swealt, and bille gebēaten make a second strand; þær, gūðe ræsum, and Frēslondum on make the third. The three strands are woven together in a stylistic braid. (p. 5)

Leyerle asserted stylistic interlace as a device consciously implemented by the Beowulf poet. He noted, furthermore, a similar technique used by Aldhelm and Alcuin, which they identify "with the phrases fingere sarta and texere sarta, 'to fashion or weave intertwinings'" (p. 4). Stylistic interlace would thus replicate surface ornamentation in the visual arts.

Having determined to his satisfaction the presence of stylistic or surface interlace in the Beowulf, Leyerle then advanced a theory concerning structural interlace. As the stylistic interlace is analogous to applied decoration, so, Leyerle contended, structural interlace is analogous to the weave of tapestries,

where positional patterning of threads establishes the shape and design of the fabric. . . . Since tapestry examples are lost, decorative interlace must serve here as a graphic representation of the principle of structural interlace, a concept difficult to explain or grasp without a visual analogue. (p. 5)

In a further attempt to clarify his concept of interlace structure, Leyerle defined it as "highly complex artificial order," which the Roman poet Horace and classically influenced medieval critics evidently preferred to a natural or chronological arrangement (pp. 5-7).

The medieval predilection for artificial forms could explain the Beowulf poet's disregard for historical chronology, but the poet's techniques cannot be explained by classical or medieval desiderata. Leyerle presented, therefore, an observation central to his view of the poem's structural unity: the main "narrative threads," namely the three focal battles and the events leading to those encounters, are intersected by material referred to by Klaeber and others as episodic and digressive. These "intersections," made possible by the extensive use of artificial order, provide contrasts of subject and theme which combine to produce Leyerle's recognized major theme of Beowulf: "the fatal contradiction at the core of heroic societies" (p. 8).⁶ In his presentation of various examples from the text, Leyerle supported his view that the juxtaposition of events emphasizes the fatal contradiction, but like other thematic means of unifying the epic, the analysis by itself is less than completely satisfying.

Leyerle further insisted that the poem is "woven with relatively few strands." Among these he included the following thematic groups: the transience of gold and its connection with violence; the consequences of the use and misuse of treasure; the importance of kinship; visits to the mead-hall; and the presence of monsters, which, as in surface interlace, "pre-empt the reader's attention" (pp. 7-13). The continual juxtaposition of these motifs and variations upon them, according to Leyerle, allows the poet to focus on the complex interconnection of events without regard to chronology. The poet's unification of diverse incidents, then, helps to produce the intensity of force characteristic of the Beowulf. The events which the poet places together, furthermore, allow for sudden reversals in mood, and such reversals support Leyerle's description of the controlling theme of the poem. According to Leyerle's argument, imitation of interlaces found in the visual arts thematically and structurally unifies the episodes and focal events in an encompassing design.

Leyerle was not the first to suggest a parallel between interlace in the plastic arts and proposed interlaces in a literary work, and his primary justification, "the term has historical probability and critical usefulness in reading Beowulf" (p. 7), may be sound. As a number of critics have suggested, however, the differences between the structure of a work of art perceived visually and the structure of a work of art perceived aurally are many and complex.⁷ Leyerle considered interlaces in diverse media "analogous" or "parallel," both of which terms signify no actual effect of one art form upon the other. The presence of interlace in the poem, therefore, would depend upon the general popularity of the technique and the accuracy of the analogy.

According to Leyerle, structural interlace corresponds to the weave of tapestries, in which "the positional patterning of threads establishes the shape and design of the fabric" (p. 5). It is true, of course, that the manner

in which the threads intersect provides the essential structure of the cloth, but tapestries, by formal definition, are woven in a very simple and systematic way. A frame the size of the finished hanging is strung with vertical threads called the "warp." Colored, horizontal or "woof" threads are then passed over and under the warp and pressed together very firmly with a comb. A color is repeated only the number of throws necessary to fill the area indicated by the drawing from which the weaver works. The arrangement of colors, not the weave, reproduces the cartoon which may have been, on occasion, an interlace (Figure 1).⁸

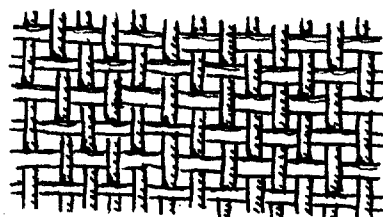


Figure 1
Tapestry Weave

Only three examples of decorative cloth from the period of the Beowulf, dated by Leyerle as the seventh or eighth century, vary from this basic warp-woof technique; these utilize a coarse soumak weave along with the ordinary

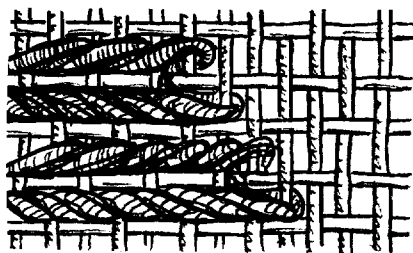


Figure 2
Soumak Weave

pattern. The soumak weave differs from the usual method merely in the addition of a contrastive thread which crosses over six warp threads on the obverse before passing to the reverse, where it is drawn back over three warp threads. Then it is passed once more to the obverse, and the pattern is repeated (Figure 2).⁹ The distribution of colors may result in an interlace as the visible design, but the placement of threads does not deviate from the consistent across--back woof. Neither the structuring warp nor woof in extant Anglo-Saxon tapestries from the period of the Beowulf bend, twist, or braid as in surface interlace.

utilize a coarse soumak weave along with the ordinary pattern. The soumak weave differs from the usual method merely in the addition of a contrastive thread which crosses over six warp threads on the obverse before passing to the reverse, where it is drawn back over three warp threads. Then it is passed once more to the obverse, and the pattern is repeated

The usual weaves of tapestries and their variations, consequently, cannot be closely allied to the complicated patterns described by Leyerle, nor can they be implemented as satisfactory analogues. If a popular artistic method influenced the Beowulf poet's craft, the history of art would explain surface interlaces but would seemingly offer no authority for structural interlace.

As Leyerle suggested, the phrase wordum wrixlan (to vary words) and the phrases of Aldhem and Alcuin, fingere or texere sorta (to fashion or weave intertwining) tend to support the identification of a rhetorical device which parallels surface interlaces in the plastic arts. A detailed examination of the Beowulf text does warrant an acceptance of Leyerle's description of stylistic or surface interlace. The poet's extensive variation of words and phrases referring to a single object or person can be identified in limited passages of the epic. Although stylistic interlace cannot be observed throughout the entire text, its acceptance as a rhetorical figure may have inspired the Beowulf poet to invent a comparable structural method as recommended by Leyerle. An examination of the text in terms of content does not, however, prove Leyerle's theory of a comprehensive unifying interlace conjoined by the monsters.

Textual Analysis

Since Leyerle's assertion of the Beowulf's interlace has its roots in the visual arts, the most effective means of determining the presence of any interlaces in the epic is a transformation of the poem's content from a verbal to a visual representation. Before the change can be effected, however, the unit of repetition must be defined. Critically accepted descriptions of the prosody, the identification of formulas with the proposed verse forms, and Leyerle's own example of stylistic interlace suggest that the half-line be the standard unit of repetition in the line.¹

The content of the half-line can then be color-coded. References to persons, groups of persons, qualities, objects, or places which have specific importance in an immediate narrative context have been assigned contrastive colors and have been termed "idea-groups."² Idea-groups which recur in disparate sections of the poem can be considered unifying elements. These have been identified as "motifs," Leyerle's word for the content of "bands." Since the method of analysis does not remove the idea-groups and motifs from their context, the flow of the narrative remains undisturbed. The poet's actual positioning of the epic's content, therefore, demonstrates repetitions and provides any evidence for emerging interlaces. The implementation of this research technique occasionally requires the subdivision of a half-line to accommodate more than one idea-group or motif.

The sequential approach to the entire text, rather than initial postulation of a limited number of concepts, made it impossible to establish in advance which idea-groups in the opening passages would later be repeated sufficiently to be considered motifs. It was, therefore, essential to expand the list of idea-groups to eighty-five, many more than Leyerle suggested in his 1967

lecture.³ Nearly half of these proved to be motifs recurring in separated sections of the poem and can possibly form the basis for unifying interlaces (Table 1).

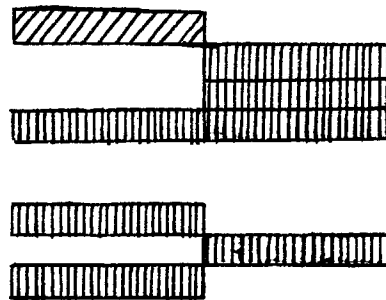
The visual model was prepared by transcribing the lines in their order onto sheets of graph paper roughly divided in half.⁴ The exact verbal content of the poem stands on the left side of each page. To the right of each verse on the same line of the paper, the idea-groups in its half-lines are color-coded in terms of their content. Blank spaces correspond to the half-lines which do not contain recognized idea-groups. The repetitions and positions of all idea-groups can thus be easily observed as vivid contrasts of color. The frequency and position of recurrence demonstrate whether the idea-groups are motifs which could form the bands and their interlaces as described by Leyerle. The total effect of this color-keying process approximates that of the borders and carpet pages of illuminated manuscripts. One need only look at the colors in order to determine the presence of any stylistic interlaces in limited passages or any structural interlaces of content invented by the Beowulf poet as a unifying device. Since costs preclude the photo-reproduction of the color matrices, descriptions of the resulting basic patterns and black-and-white representations of limited sections of the color charts demonstrate the analytic technique.

Three fundamental configurations of motifs appear in the color-keyed content: irregular groupings, clusters, and uninterrupted series. The matrices evidence isolated segments of color throughout the greater portion of the poem, with motifs occurring singly or in pairs. Lines 1192-1201 demonstrate such irregular groupings (Example A).⁵ This segment of the verse from the narration of the banquet after Grendel's death begins with a single reference to Beowulf followed by the rather sporadic recurrence of a single motif, that of treasure.

Table 1
Recognized Motifs

Category	Motif	Number of Fitts in which motif appears
Persons	Æschere Beowulf Ectheow Freawaru Hæthcyn Heremod Hetwere Hrothgar Hrothgar's sons Hrothulf Hygd Hygelac thief Unferth Wealtheow Wiglaf	5 39 3 3 3 2 2 30 2 2 4 13 3 7 8 6
Tribes	Danes Geats Jutes Swedes	29 37 3 3
Creatures	Grendel Grendel's dam dragon	25 8 12
Supernatural Powers	God Wyrd	30 8
Human Characterisitcs	good qualities evil qualities feud/death sorrow	38 13 41 21
Material Goods	treasure weaponry	39 38
Places	sea shore ships Heorot dragon's barrow Beowulf's barrow funeral pyres heaven	23 11 9 33 10 4 5 4

Him wæs ful boren, and frēondlāpu
wordum bewægned, and wunden gold
ēstum geēawed, earm[h]rēade twā,
hrægl ond hringas, healsbēaga mæst
þara þe ic on foldan gefrægen hæbbe.
Nænige ic under swegle sēlran hýrde
Hordmāðum hælepa, syððan Hāma ætwæg
tō þære byrhtan byrig Brōsinga mene,
sigel ond sincfæt,-- searonidas fleah
Eomenrices, geceas ecne ræd.--
[ll. 1192-1201]



EXAMPLE A

To him was born a cup, and friendly greetings
with words offered, and twisted gold
kindly bestowed, two arm-ornaments,
corslet and rings, of collars the finest
of which on earth I have ever heard.
Never have I under heaven heard of so good
a hoard-gem of heroes, since Hama carried off
to his bright fortress the Brosing's necklace,
jewel and setting, crafty treachery he fled
of Eormanic, he chose eternal help.

Hordwynne fond
eald ūhtsceaða opene standan,
sē ðe byrnende biorgas sēced,
nacod niðdraca, nihtes fleoged
fýre befangen
[ll. 2270b-2274a]



EXAMPLE B

A delightful hoard found
that old night foe standing open,
he who flaming seeks the hills
the naked hostile dragon flies by night
by fire enveloped

KEY:



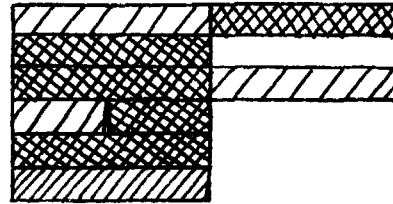
These seven allusions to treasure occur singly or in pairs, and most are isolated from one another, as indicated by the numerous blank spaces on the matrix.

Some sections of the charts demonstrate concentrations of a single motif in either the a- or the b-half-lines. These instances illustrate the poet's repetitions of motifs in alternate half-lines. As the poet describes the dragon's discovery of the barrow-treasure (Example B), references to the dragon are grouped in the a-half-lines. The resulting block of color contrasts sharply with the blank spaces which correspond to the b-half-lines in the passage. A similar instance of what might be termed "clustering" appears in Beowulf's speech to the Danish coast warden (Example C). The cluster of motifs in this section of verse consists of four allusions to Hrothgar, three to the Geats, and one to Beowulf, only two of the eight encoded motifs being positioned in the b-half-lines. Although the recurrence of motifs produces a cluster, the ordered position of individual motifs presents no fixed pattern.

In very few brief segments of the charts, the repetition of two or more colors fills the matrix completely, indicating patterned repetition comparable to the stylistic or surface interlace described by Leyerle. Of these uninterrupted series, Beowulf's speech before descending to the hag's lair is the longest (Example D). In these eighteen lines, multiple references to ten motifs occur. The two motifs which repeat with some consistency throughout the passage are "Hrothgar" and "Beowulf." A few of the remaining motifs, such as "Geats," "feud/death," "weaponry," and "Unferth," recur minimally and only in two- or three-line segments. The Ectheow and Hygelac motifs each appear only once, while allusions to treasure and good qualities occur a number of times, though never in pairs.

Wē þurh holdne hige hlāford þīnne,
 sunu Healfdenes secean cwōmon,
 lēodgebyrgean; we þū ūs lārena gōd!
 Habbað wē tō þām mæran micel ærende
 Deniga frēan; ne sceal þær dyrne sum
 wesan, þæs ic wēne.

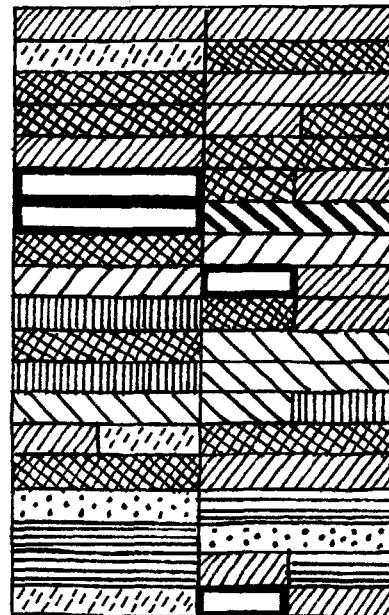
[ll. 267-272a]



EXAMPLE C

We in friendly spirit your lord,
 Healfdene's son come to find,
 the people's protector; be good to us in your counsel!
 We have to the illustrious one an important errand
 to the lord of the Danes; nor shall there be anything hid
 that I know.

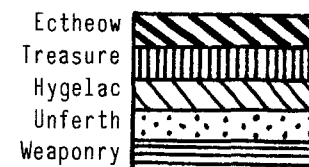
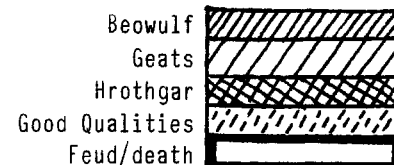
Beowulf mabelode, bearn Ecgbēowes:
 'Gepenc nū, se mæra maga Healfdenes,
 snottra fengel, nū ic eom sīdes fūs,
 goldwine gumena, hwæt wit gēo spræcon,
 gif ic æt þearfe þīnre scolde
 aldre linnan, þæt ðu mē ā wære
 forðgewitenum on fæder stæle.
 Wes þu mundbora minum magobegnum,
 hondgesellum, gif mec hild nime;
 swylce þu ðā mādmas, þe þu mē sealdest,
 Hrōðgār lēofa, Higelāce onsend.
 Mæg þonne on þām golde ongitan Geāta dryhten,
 geseon sunu Hrædles, þonne hē on þæt sinc starað
 þæt ic gumcystum godne funde
 beāga bryttan, breac þonne mōste.
 Ond þu Unferð læt ealde lāfe,
 wrætlic wægsweord wīdcūðne man
 heardecg habban; ic mē mid Hruntinge
 dōm gewyrce, opðe mec dēað nīmed!' [ll. 1473-1491]



EXAMPLE D

Beowulf spoke, Ectheow's son:
 "Think now, noble kinsman of Healfdede,
 prudent prince, now I am eager for the journey,
 gold-friend of men, of what we two formerly spoke,
 if I while in service to you should
 lose my life, that you would for me
 if I die, take my father's place.
 Be you the protector of my band of retainers,
 my companions, if battle take me;
 so also the treasures, which you gave me,
 dear Hrothgar, send to Hygelac.
 When he perceives the gold may the lord of the Geats,
 see, the son of Hrethel, when he gazes at the treasure,
 that I a manly-virtued good man found
 a giver of rings, enjoyed while I could.
 And let Unferth have my old sword,
 splendid wave-decorated sword, that well-known man,
 with its hard edge; I will with Hrunting
 achieve glory, or death take me!"

KEY:



As indicated by the color matrices, then, motifs are distributed in three basic arrangements, either in irregular groupings, in clusters, or in uninterrupted series of eighteen lines or less. These three types and their variations may be used as the basis for discussing the matrices of an extended selection of consecutive lines. As the poet's practice does not differ significantly throughout the entire epic, 836 verses from the beginning of the poem through Fitt XII are discussed here in detail to demonstrate the results of this analysis.

Introduction through Fitt V

The well-known opening lines of Beowulf include a number of motifs which recur throughout the entire poem: references to the Danes, good qualities, feud or death, weaponry, and treasure. The first thirty-one lines present irregular groupings, with the motif "good qualities" appearing most frequently. Lines 32-52, the description of Scyld's funeral, contain a number of motif clusters. References to the ship are grouped in b-half-lines 32-38, with two intervening mentions of treasure in lines 36b and 37b. Three successive allusions to weaponry (ll. 39a-40) follow this cluster. The remaining twelve lines present references to the Danes, treasure, the sea, and sorrow in no fixed pattern.

Repetitions in this section of the poem, as elsewhere, occur frequently in pairs, either in successive or alternate half-lines. This technique of repetition, often termed "variation," is evidenced in lines 17b-20a, in which references to God, Scyld's son Beowulf, and good qualities alternate:

. . . him þæs Liffrea,
wuldres Wealdend woroldāre forgeaf,
Bēowulf wæs brēme --blāed wīde sprang--
Scyldes eafera

[To him the Life-Lord, glory's ruler, worldly honor granted;
Beowulf was famed--his renown spread far--Scyld's son]

The first numbered division of the epic opens with similar paired allusions to Scyld and his son. Other motifs from the introduction, "Danes," "good qualities," and "treasure," carry over into Fitt I, but their recurrence here is minimal. Lines 61-90 introduce an entirely new set of motifs, "Hrothgar," "Heorot," and "Grendel," and they prove to be the central motifs in Fitt I.

Irregular groupings of the motifs "Hrothgar," "good qualities," and "Danes" occur throughout lines 61-73. The following two lines contain no ideagroups, but the four references to Heorot in lines 76-78 form a cluster. A more extensive pattern results from the poet's combination of the motifs "God" and "feud/death" in lines 106-110:

sipðan him Scyppend forscriften hæfde
 in Cāines cynne-- þone cwealm gewræc
 ēce Drihten, þæs þe hē Ābel slōg;
 ne gefeah hē þære fæde, ac hē hine feor forwræc,
 Metod for þȳ mǣne mancynne fram.

[After the Creator had outlawed them as Cain's kin, for that murder avenged, the eternal Lord, when Cain killed Abel; he did not rejoice in that hostile act, but he was banished far away, the Ruler drove him for his crime away from mankind.]

The God motif, along with a single reference to feud, recurs three times in the a-halflines, while the b-halflines evidence two instances of the feud motif. Two lines later, "God" and "feud/death" are again combined, though this time in reference to Cain's offspring, "þā wið Gode wunnon lange þrāge;/ hē him ðæs lēan forgeald" (ll. 113b-114: against them God fought for a long time; he repaid them for their faults).

Most of the remaining motifs in Fitt I, however, occur in isolation, and only a few repeat in pairs, as in lines 65b-66a, "herespēd gyfen/ wiges weordmynd" (war-speed given, war glory) and lines 80b-81a, "bēagas dælde,/ sinc æt symle" (dealt out rings, treasure at feast). With the few exceptions noted, the majority of motifs in Fitt I occur in isolate, irregular groupings.

The second fitt of Beowulf, in contrast to the preceding lines, contains four motif clusters which perhaps demonstrate the Beowulf poet's use of repetition to emphasize the focal events of the poem. The first cluster combines allusions to the Danes, sorrow, Grendel, and evil qualities.

Fand þā ǵær inne æþelinge gedriht
 swefan æfter symble; sorge ne cūðon,
 wonscaft wera. Wiht unhælo,
 grim ond grædig, gearo sōna wæs
 rēoc ond rēpe, on ræste genam
 þrītīg þegne

[ll. 118-123a: He found therein a band of retainers sleeping after the feast; they knew not sorrow, miseries of men. The unholy creature, grim and greedy, was soon eager, savage and cruel, and in their rest took thirty thanes]

The second cluster occurs in the narration of the morning's events. These four lines evidence variations of the motifs "sorrow" and "Hrothgar."

þa wæs æfter wiste wōp up āhafen,
 micel morgenswēg. Mære þēoden,
 æþeling ærgōd, unblīðe sæt,
 þolode ǵryðswyð þegnsorge drēah

[ll. 128-131: There was after prosperity great weeping raised up, great morning cry. The great chief, proven prince, sat unhappily, suffered mightily, endured sorrow for his thanes]

These lines are followed by scattered references to feud, Grendel, and the Danes.

The sorrow motif then reappears, this time introducing a cluster dominated by the feud/death motif with minimal allusions to Hrothgar and Grendel:

twelf wintra tīd torn gepolode
 wine Scyldinga, wēana gehwelcne,
 sīdra sorge; forðām [secgum] weard
 ylða bearnum undryne cūð
 gyddum geōmore, þætte Grendel wan
 hwīle wið Hrōþgār, hetenīðas wæg,

fyrene ond fæhðe, fela missēra,
singāle sæce

[ll. 147-154a: Twelve winters' time suffered anguish the lord of the Scyldings, every misery, great sorrow; therefore to men it became, to the children of men, clearly known sadly in songs, that Grendel fought a while against Hrothgar, the enmity he bore, wicked deeds and feud many half-years, continual strife]

Three references to the Danes and two allusions to Grendel follow the cluster; the Dane motifs are isolated from one another, and the Grendel motifs form a pair in lines 160b and 161a. Two lines farther on a fourth cluster begins. This group of motifs consists of alternate references to Grendel and his crimes and ends with the now familiar allusions to Hrothgar's sorrow in lines 170-171a, "þæt wæs wræc micel wine Scyldinga,/ mōdes brecca" (such was the great misery of the Scylding chief, the grief of his heart).

The placement of colors resulting from charting this section of the poem reveals an emphasis on the sorrow motif. The first cluster contains only paired references to sorrow, but in the second cluster this motif becomes the main subject, recurring five times in seven half-lines. Once allusions to sorrow are thus established by extensive repetitions, the poet might use the motif as a referent to draw attention to other important events of the narrative, as in the third cluster, in which "sorrow" introduces a description of Grendel's attacks. Then follows a discussion of the Danes' inability to fight the monster effectively, leading to the fourth cluster. This group of motifs dwells on Grendel's hostility and ends with a reiteration of Hrothgar's sorrow. If a narration of Grendel's attacks is considered the central intrigue of Beowulf 115-171, then the clusters could indicate not a complex interlacing of motifs, but merely the poet's use of concepts previously emphasized to introduce with greater effect the focal events of the narrative.